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THE DILEMMA OF THE INTELLECTUALIST THEORY OF TRUTH

IS the intellectualist in his theory of truth an anarchistic subjectivist? Considerably to my own surprise, reflection has convinced me that he usually is. He insists that truth is a property of ideas (the term is used to include judgments, beliefs, all mental functions having cognitional value) *antecedent* to any process of verification; he insists that this antecedent self-possession, self-contained property determines the working of an idea, or its verification. It follows that truths come into existence (arise or first subsist) when certain ideas are entertained. Until Columbus (or somebody else) entertained the idea that the world was round, the truth (being a self-contained property of the idea) that the world was round was non-existent. When the idea that the value of π is 3.1415926 arose in some one's mind, *this* truth was then and there created, and so on.¹ Such is the logical implication of this "antecedent property" theory. Note, further, the accidental and arbitrary way in which ideas arise, if truth is an independent property of them. They just happen. For the intellectualist can not deny that a large share of the ideas of men possess an antecedent property of falsity rather than of truth. If these properties of truth and falsity are ultimate, self-contained, and unique properties; if an idea is as likely to have one kind of property as the other; and if there is nothing in an idea which reveals upon bare inspection which of the two kinds of property is possessed, surely the intellectualist is committed to a belief in the thoroughly atomistic nature of truths.

A reply which the intellectualist might presumably make to these statements will be found only to enforce them. The reply is that the intellectualist holds that the self-contained truth-property of ideas consists in their relation of agreement or correspondence to things. Precisely: he makes the relation of agreement with things which constitutes truth a self-contained property of ideas. It is this very fact which commits him to the baldest kind of psychical idea-ism—not to dignify it with the title of idealism. If there were anything in the so-called cognitive self-transcendency of ideas which concretely lighted upon their intended objects so that their truth or falsity was self-luminous, the appeal of the intellectualist to "agreement with reality" would have some bearing; but since such phosphorescence is notoriously lacking, this so-called "self-transcendency" is obviously, after all, only an internal property of an idea *qua* idea.

I shall, however, be properly reminded that not all intellectualists

¹ I do not raise the question whether truths cease to exist when their ideas vanish, though this would seem also to follow.

make truth a property of ideas. Some make it a property of things, events, objects. That Columbus discovered America, that water is H_2O , are truths independent of *any* ideas. Well then, is not *this* type of intellectualism committed to absolutistic rationalism? If things, events, are properly called truths, then the universe must be conceived as a truth-system, *i. e.*, a system of relations of reason, or as "objective thought." The frantic disclaimers of many contemporary anti-pragmatists of sympathy with the Hegelian theory of truth (or that of Bradley or Royce) seem rather amusing. What escape from sophistic subjectivism have they except this theory? The other day I ran across the following quotation from Bossuet in Janet's *Final Causes*: "If I now ask where and in what subject these truths subsist, eternal and immutable as they are, I am obliged to own a being wherein truth eternally subsists and is always understood; and this being must be the truth itself, and must be all truth; and from it is derived the truth in all that is."² Why not, if truths exist *per se* in the order of nature?

The non-pragmatist, if logical, thus appears as either a pure subjectivist or as an objective absolutist. Usually he is not logical, but oscillates at will between the two positions, using one at need to cover up the weakness of the other.

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DISCUSSION

A FEW WORDS IN REPLY TO PROFESSOR MOORE'S CRITICISM OF "ANTI-PRAGMATISME"

THE interesting discussion of my "Anti-Pragmatisme" by Professor Moore in the issue of this JOURNAL for May 27 calls for a few words in reply.

That the ideas expressed in the work under consideration should not meet with the entire approval of pragmatists was to be expected; and that a critic should not present the author's views just as the latter would have done himself—there is nothing strange in that. This is human nature, and we all have our share of it. I may be justified, however, in asking to be allowed to correct just *one* false impression conveyed to the reader of Mr. Moore's criticism who would not be acquainted with the book itself. Mr. Moore gives it as my claim that: "Intellectualism is to save us from the 'consequences' of pragmatism—especially the American brand of pragmatism—which are: a crass materialism, a characteristic 'opportunism,' and philistinism in general, in which all moral control breaks down and

² English translation, page 395.